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# MODERN LANGUAGE NOTES

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## PRÉCIOSITÉ AFTER THE 17TH CENTURY

The true history of *préciosité*, when finally written, will discount the efforts of patriots to pin on some neighboring nation the responsibility for what has been a periodically fashionable indisposition. A seeking of causes rather than of material for recrimination would have made for a more equable literary temperature in Spain, Italy, England, France, whenever Gongorism, Marinism, Euphuism, *préciosité* came under discussion. It would, likewise, have saved the critical reputation of some worthy literary figures from a slight amount of unnecessary strain. It would, for instance, have spared somewhat Ménage's authority as an observer of *préciosité*,<sup>1</sup> done no harm to Chapelain's standing as a student of medieval French,<sup>2</sup> and obviated an excusable inaccuracy on the part of Professor Tinker.<sup>3</sup>

A brief inquiry made elsewhere<sup>4</sup> has indicated the existence of mature *préciosité* long before the 17th century. To point out that,

<sup>1</sup> *Ménagiana*, II, pp. 65-66: " . . . dès cette première Représentation (of the *Préc. Rid.*, Nov. 18, 1659) l'on revint du galimatias, & du style forcé."

<sup>2</sup> Chapelain, *De la Lecture des Vieux Romans*, MDCCXXVIII, pp. 328-329: "Premièrement, la manière de converser entre ces chevaliers et ces Dames, c'est-à-dire, selon ma supposition, celle du tems où ce Livre (*Lancelot*) fut écrit, étoit simple & naïve, sans gentillesse et sans agrément, mais de bon sens, claire, & laconique à ne rien dire que de nécessaire, & à dire tout ce qu'il falloit, *morata* plutôt qu'*urbana*, telle à peu près que celle des Romains du tems de Numa, en un mot peu galante et fort solide."

<sup>3</sup> Tinker, *The Salon and English Letters*, 1915, p. 29: "It is no less true that the women of the salons were not permanently *précieuses ridicules*. Preciosity had its day; it did its work (which was by no means contemptible); and it was laughed out of existence. There were no *précieuses* in 1750."

<sup>4</sup> *Recurrent Préciosité*, *Mod. Lang. Notes*, XXXI, p. 129.

in spite of Molière and Boileau, *préciosité* has had an uninterrupted and fruitful career between the age of Louis XIV and our day may prove not uninteresting to those who see in the affectation something much more vital than a fancy bred in the Hôtel de Rambouillet and passing away with that "cour choisie," as Fléchier calls it.

The words *précieux*, *précieuse*, *préciosité* are applied so frequently by French writers to the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries that no doubt can be entertained as to the capability of the disease to survive strong hostile treatment. M. Bastide, for example, finds in the style of Pierre Coste "au début du XVIIIe. siècle, comme un *dernier* et faible écho de l'Hôtel de Rambouillet et de la société des précieuses," and rightly terms touching the attempts of Mlle Suson de Brun to imitate this style, which had greatly impressed her.<sup>5</sup> Voltaire scorns as "trop précieux pour lui" the society at the Marquise de Lambert's salon.<sup>6</sup> None too complimentary to the Marquise Céliante, "cette petite précieuse," is the maid in Poinciset's *Cercle* (1764).<sup>7</sup> The *précieux* phrases of La Motte in the 18th century differ in nothing from the circumlocutions of the 17th century *précieuses*.<sup>8</sup> Having developed an individual method of expression, Marivaux, whose name became almost synonymous with *préciosité*, was doomed to hear "Fontenelle l'excuser de son style précieux,"<sup>9</sup> and, what was probably more galling, to suffer Prévost's "croirait-on qu'il fût possible de faire l'apologie du style précieux?"<sup>10</sup> But Marivaux did not invent his mannerism: "Il avait pour autorités La Bruyère quelquefois, Dufresny et Hamilton souvent, Fontenelle presque toujours."<sup>11</sup> At the end of the 17th century, characterized by a rejuvenation of fine writing and refined speaking, the affectation appears in the most eloquent ser-

<sup>5</sup> Bastide, *Anglais et Français du XVIIe. Siècle*, 1912, p. 318.

<sup>6</sup> Mary Summer (Mme Charlotte Filon Foucaux), *Quelques Salons de Paris au XVIIIe. Siècle*, 1898, p. 20.

<sup>7</sup> Poinciset, *Le Cercle, ou La Soirée à la Mode*, in *Répertoire général du Théâtre Français*, vol. XII, MDCCCXVIII, p. 228.

<sup>8</sup> Livet, *Dict. des Préc.*, *préf.* pp. xxxi-xxxii: e. g., *l'oracle roulant du destin for un dé à jouer, les chambres garnies for l'hypocrisie des gens au doux parler, le suisse d'un jardin for une haie.*

<sup>9</sup> Fleury, *Marivaux et le Marivaudage*, 1881, p. 241.

<sup>10</sup> Brunetière, *Études Critiques*, 3e série, 1904, p. 173.

<sup>11</sup> Fleury, *op. cit.*, p. 278.

mons of Massillon; and that it must have had a tremendous vogue in the early part of the succeeding century, its presence in Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes* and *L'Esprit des Lois*<sup>12</sup> and Le Sage's stinging persecution of the contemporary *précieuses* demonstrate with sufficient force.

The best as well as the worst underwent contamination. Even the most celebrated poets of the nineteenth century were not exempt from the malady, though, in the opinion of so many historians and critics, the plague had long before been utterly stamped out. Among others, Victor Hugo was peculiarly susceptible to it, and Barat is correct in commenting thus on his poem, *A Mes Odes*: "C'est joli, mais précieux plutôt que pittoresque; tout le monde d'ailleurs est précieux de 1823 à 1826."<sup>13</sup> Musset, though rarely, is occasionally guilty of rather flagrant *préciosité*:<sup>14</sup> and as for Théophile Gautier, he espoused its cause fearlessly and with warmth.<sup>15</sup> More recently, in the words of Gustave Kahn, Huysmans "enseignait la préciosité, et tentait à dire rien avec pittoresque,"<sup>16</sup> and Saint-Pol Roux combined, frequently to excess, the characteristics of both the *précieux* and the Gongorist.<sup>17</sup>

Without any question, Voltaire saw the thing in the right light in his own day when he declared that the style of the *précieuses* had been revived because of the ambition to shine,—though that single reason would not explain the entire subsequent course of *préciosité*. The hankering for invidious distinction seems, in all countries, to have been the opening wedge for *préciosité*, affecting manners as well as speech.<sup>18</sup> The noblemen who, in the sixteenth century, innovated in language by means of such phrases as *j'allons, je ferions*,<sup>19</sup>—and thereby did a fairly permanent injury

<sup>12</sup> Brunetière, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

<sup>13</sup> Barat, *Le Style Poétique et la Révolution Romantique*, 1904, p. 115.

<sup>14</sup> Fleury, *op. cit.*, p. 304.

<sup>15</sup> Du Camp, *Théophile Gautier*, 1895, p. 100: " . . . il estimait le précieux et ne s'en cachait pas: 'La préciosité, cette belle fleur française qui s'épanouit si bien dans les parterres à compartiments des jardins de la vieille école, et que Molière a si méchamment foulée aux pieds dans je ne sais plus quelle immortelle mauvaise petite pièce.'"

<sup>16</sup> Kahn, *Symbolistes et Décadents*, 1902, p. 35.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 323.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. the dictionary definition of *préciosité*: "Affectation dans les manières, dans le langage . . ." (*Petit Larousse*).

<sup>19</sup> Diancourt, *Atlas litt. de la France*, 1878, p. 90.

to the grammatical purity of the speech of many rustic communities,—were inspired by motives similar to those which, in the process of time, furnished the *précieuses* with a highly variegated repertory and enlarged the conception of *préciosité*.

It was to be expected that the men and women who favored unusual practices in language should be members of a select, exclusive group in either a social or a literary sense. This fact, not so clear in the seventeenth century, because so many historians have beclouded the premises, is evident in later periods. It can be seen that the people of the salons in the eighteenth century were the *précieux* of whom we hear, and that they formed a close corporation which influenced language and style very definitely. There is practically no escape from the conclusion that Marivaux's mannerisms are the mannerisms of the coterie to which he belonged.<sup>20</sup> This group, restricted at first, attracted imitators through its social and literary powers, again put *préciosité* on the boards,<sup>21</sup> and once more drew a line between the elect and the herd. De Pure's definition of *précieuse* (1656) applies anew.<sup>22</sup> In recent years the principle of exclusivism for literary purposes has been reiterated, especially among the Symbolists.<sup>23</sup>

Naturally, one of the first results of this self-inflicted exclusiveness has been the formation of a "finer" language. To talk like everybody else was to be commonplace. It was in order to

<sup>20</sup> Brunetière, *op. cit.*, pp. 127-128.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Mary Summer, *op. cit.*, p. 213: "Enfin, dans la précieuse Araminte, (in Poinset's *Cercle*, 1764) chacun voulait voir le portrait frappant de la maîtresse du logis. Cette satire mordante, qui fut représentée au Théâtre Français, décida de la vogue du salon de Mme de Beauharnais: on était curieux de juger *de visu* ce qui avait soulevé tant de railleries."

<sup>22</sup> Roederer, *Mémoire pour servir à l'histoire de la Société Polie en France*, MDCCCXXXV, p. 136: "Aussi de Pure dit-il dans ce même roman, publié en 1656, que le mot de précieuse est un *mot du temps*, un *mot à la mode*, qui a cours aujourd'hui comme autrefois celui de prude ou de feuillantine, et qui s'applique à certaines personnes du beau sexe qui ont su se tirer du *prix commun*, et ont acquis une espèce et un rang tout particulier. Elles sont, dit-il, une secte nouvelle."

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Kahn, *op. cit.*, pp. 32 and 42; Beaunier, *La Poésie nouvelle*, MCMII, p. 90 (where mention is made of Laforgue's dictum, "Pour éloigner le bourgeois, . . . se cuirasser d'un peu de fumisme extérieur . . ."), and p. 241 (concerning Viélé-Griffin's refusal to "reconnaître à 'tous les épiciers' le droit de contempler, dimanches et fêtes, la Vénus! ")

evade this stigma that Marivaux indulged in his fine-spun verbiage and in his pretentious metaphors.<sup>24</sup> Just as ordinary expressions were esteemed vulgar in the seventeenth century, so, in the eighteenth, such words as *cruche*, *choux*, *foin*, *pois*, *noisette*, *couloir*, *claire*, were declared taboo in some gatherings;<sup>25</sup> and when, in the nineteenth, Rimbaud's sonnet on the vowels is interpreted by the young Symbolists, or Moréas explains the need of "impollués vocables, la période qui s'arcboute,"<sup>26</sup> and the like, or Laforgue speaks his own particular dialect, some very peculiar and almost unintelligible language ensues.<sup>27</sup> To such an extent were plain, familiar words excruciating at times to the more sensitive natures among the women and the poets that even Julie de Lespinasse, the *grande amoureuse*, a woman of acumen and solid qualities, nearly fainted at Buffon's "c'est une autre paire de manches."<sup>28</sup> In Saurin's *Les Mœurs du Temps* (1760) the Countess cries: "Eh! fi! monsieur, c'est un plaisir ignoble. Le soleil n'est fait que pour le peuple."<sup>29</sup> With an avowedly deep purpose,—which can be accepted without too great a reduction,—Gustave Kahn and Stuart Merrill shun every-day words, stringing together rare terms, meaningful for themselves, and perhaps for themselves only.<sup>30</sup> The atmosphere in which they live is an upper, ethereal region. An extension of this reaction to "higher" influences placed good, robust health, in the days of Mme du Deffand (who lived to the age of eighty-three years), among the vulgar, indelicate incidents of life.<sup>31</sup> The acute sensibilities of well-bred ladies required indulgence in hysterics and other nervous fits on notable occasions, as when august literary lions like Laharpe and Mar-

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Bruneitère, *op. cit.*, pp. 172 and 273.

<sup>25</sup> Mornet, *Le Romantisme en France au XVIIIe. Siècle*, 1912, p. 238: These "et d'autres rusticités se trouvent dans la traduction de Gessner par Huber . . .; mais Huber s'en excuse, et Clément de Dijon s'en indigne. On peut traduire Homère, mais on ne doit pas l'avilir."

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Moréas, *Prem. Armes du Symbolisme*, 1889, p. 34.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Beaunier, *op. cit.*, pp. 61, 83, 141.

<sup>28</sup> Mary Summer, *op. cit.*, pp. 95-96.

<sup>29</sup> Saurin, *Les Mœurs du Temps*, in *Répertoire Général du Théâtre Français*, vol. XII, MDCCXVIII, pp. 188-189.

<sup>30</sup> Beaunier, *op. cit.*, pp. 317-318.

<sup>31</sup> Mary Summer, *op. cit.*, p. 65: "Elle (Septimanie d'Egmont) a mis aussi à la mode les vapeurs, les attaques de nerfs, les évanouissements, tout l'arsenal des coquettes pour conquérir et attendrir."

montel recited their extraordinary compositions in some drawing-room. Acquainted with the requirements of true decorum, Lisette, in the *Cercle*, affirms: "Vraiment, c'est que vous ignorez encore, mademoiselle, que rien n'est moins décent, dans le grand monde, que de jouir d'une santé parfaite . . ." <sup>32</sup> She might have added that a sturdy physical constitution was incompatible with the ability to appreciate beauty or to enjoy culture. Delicacy, fragility, extreme sensitiveness,—which were not nearly so much the rule in actuality as they are in the paintings of the period,—most readily gained invidious distinction for those who seemed to have them.

Later it was, indeed, "une autre paire de manches." The *précieux* fashion had changed. In 1845 bagnio types and slang were the fad among the Four Hundred.<sup>33</sup> By 1866 *argot* had become firmly intrenched in sections of French society. Villars found it worth while to play Molière to his fellow-Parisians in *Les Précieuses du Jour*,<sup>34</sup>—though so faithfully as to render his play almost illegible to us today,<sup>35</sup>—and Sardou included specimens of the new and harder *préciosité* in his *Famille Benoiton*. The mode owed much to the English turf, to English *high life*, to English military men, and to the seamy side of the English stage,<sup>36</sup> just as the *précieux* mode of Lilly's and Voiture's epoch had leaned on the languishing and pretty proceedings in Italian drawing-rooms; just as the enthusiasm for things English in the eighteenth century dominated not the speech alone of French society and literature, but even the architecture and the household arrangements.

<sup>32</sup> Poinsinet, *Cercle*, p. 220.

<sup>33</sup> Diancourt, *Atlas litt.*, p. 129.

<sup>34</sup> Villars, *Les Précieuses du Jour*, 1866, pp. 9-10: "Je l'ai dit et je le répète, mes Précieuses sont sorties toutes armées de la grossièreté du langage moderne, comme celles de Molière naquirent du langage alambiqué de l'hôtel Rambouillet."

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Larroumet, *Ét. de litt. et d'art*, 1893, pp. 29-30.

<sup>36</sup> An example of the English influence: Villars, *Les Préc. du Jour*, p. 22: "Marthe, *câlinant le général*. Bon! . . . la soupe au lait qui monte . . . ça va renverser! . . . Voyons, tonton chéri . . . Zizine a raison . . . je crois qu'ils voulaient nous faire poser . . . et puis, ils ne sont pas drôles ces pèlerins-là, ils ne parlent ni worth, ni sport, ni turf, ni box, ni bock, ni boock, ni match, ni pick, ni pie, ni ring, ni stik, ni stock . . . Sont-ils seulement éleveurs, coureurs, entraîneurs, cricketteurs, highlifeurs?"

The history of the variations in *préciosité* shows that what is *précieux* is most often likely to start out as an imitation of foreign practices,—since what is foreign is to us abnormal and hence affected,—and that those who seek the repute of singularity or of superiority in this direction will in the majority of cases choose as the object of their idolatry the foreign country most,—or least,—in the public eye at the time.

Now, England, during the eighteenth century and a large part of the nineteenth century, was like a land recently opened up to French men and women. Anglomania was rife, and Voltaire, in 1764, took occasion to defend the current craze<sup>37</sup> which Saurin, for one, had, with the best of intentions, of course, held up to ridicule.<sup>38</sup> The influence of the magic shibboleth “English” apparently had no limit. Vocabulary, philosophy, dress, the drama, landscape gardening,—everything was copied after English originals.<sup>39</sup> British melancholy invaded the tranquil gaiety of the most gently nurtured of the French. Commerce with Young, Ossian, Thomson filled many imaginative Gallic minds with lugubrious visions of majestic mists, awful depths, impetuous streams, secular trees, delicious and fatal disorders, eternal abysses,<sup>40</sup> and there was in the experience a decidedly pleasurable and rather voluptuous sensation which was soon communicated to the leaders of the rising Romantic School. The Ossianic *précieuses* took up their abode by rushing rivers and shuddering chasms,—while over in England, as may be gathered from the poems of Mrs. Aphra Behn, the comments of Walpole, the activities of Mrs. Montagu, some of the Johnsonian dicta, and the phraseology of Mrs. Carter,<sup>41</sup> the

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Tinker, *op. cit.*, p. 12, note 3.

<sup>38</sup> Saurin, *L'Anglomanie*, MDCCLXXIII, *avertissement*, pp. iii-iv: “. . . je n'ai voulu attaquer que cet enthousiasme aveugle de nos Anglomanes, que cette espèce de culte qu'ils rendent aux Auteurs Anglais, peut-être moins pour les exalter que pour rabaisser les nôtres.”

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10: “On s'habille, on se coiffe & l'on *toste* à l'anglaise . . .”: also, p. 14, 30; p. 13:

Suivant l'usage Anglais, j'ai voulu, ce matin,  
Qu'on fît, d'un grand Parterre, un petit Boulingrin;  
J'y veux avoir de tout, des vallons, des collines . . .

<sup>40</sup> Mornet, *op. cit.*, pp. 175-176.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Tinker, *op. cit.*, pp. 225, 95, 108, 119, 134, 140.



reigning preciosity aped the social and literary mannerisms of the French salons of the seventeenth century.

From such evidence as happens to be at hand, it would seem that the feminine and masculine rôles in *préciosité* have diverged in the history of the movement. The association of *précieux* manners with *précieux* speech has occurred generally on the initiative of the women, whereas for the men *préciosité* has been mainly a linguistic or artistic endeavor. The *précieuse* both spoke and dressed the part. The male of the species only spoke it. If, in addition, the ladies could dazzle in other ways, no hesitancy was shown in assuming the necessary attitudes, gestures and verbal idiosyncrasies. Even learning was incurred; and the *femmes savantes*, who constituted merely another sect of *précieuses*, abounded as well after the seventeenth century as before. Voltaire's friend, the Marquise du Châtelet, and Mme de Staël ought not, perhaps, to be reckoned within this group, since, as in the case of modern scientific women, their interest in research was sincere and abiding. But Mme Geoffrin's disciple, Mme Necker,<sup>42</sup> Bachaumont's eldest daughter,<sup>43</sup> Jeanne de Montesson,<sup>44</sup> at intervals, Mme de Lambert, and many more carried the banner of erudition with an air not exempt from pomp and vanity. In the first decades of the eighteenth century Paris could have furnished all the factors for an incisive continuation of the *Femmes Savantes*.<sup>45</sup> Latterly, the brand of infamy has been conspicuously absent in those instances in which women have gone in for learning. The pursuit of erudition has been made hard and exacting, even for men; and the women who have won scholarly distinction have earned it on a fair field where no favors were shown, and have found it of very little invidious social value.

In general, then, just as in the age of Marie de Champagne or

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Goncourt, *Portraits intimes du XVIIIe Siècle*, I, p. 16.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Mary Summer, *op. cit.*, pp. 186-187.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Goncourt, *Port. int.*, II, p. 238: "Paris était devenu la maison de Philaminte. Il avait des "femmes savantes," et il avait des "hommes savants." Le grec et le latin régnaient, les traducteurs gouvernaient, les restituteurs de textes florissaient, les annotateurs passaient grands hommes, les conseillers de sens hommes célèbres. Le latin était la passion, il était la mode du temps. Les Ninons ne se faisaient plus lire des comédies, mais du latin mis en français. La contagion passait les mers et gagnait Londres."

of Julie d'Angennes, the symptoms of *préciosité*, recurring repeatedly, have comprised exclusivism, a craze for the foreign or the distant, a passion for sentimental metaphysics, scorn for the *bourgeois*,—especially among *bourgeois*,—extravagance and affectation in deportment, dress, and speech, along with the feminization of the social and literary environment. There has also been a genuine, earnest, honest desire to increase the possibilities of the French language and of French diction,—above all, in recent days.

The inadequacy of customary French for work or discussion in which the imaginative and the picturesque are prominent has been felt from the Renaissance on. Dissatisfaction with the common mode of expression has been particularly noticeable among women-writers, and the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have had their literary Madelons as well as the seventeenth. We have only to read at random in the works of Myriam Harry, Mme Tinayre, Gérard d'Houville, the Comtesse de Noailles, in order to become conscious of the transmigration of Mlle de Scudéry's spirit,<sup>46</sup> modernized, it is true, and intensified in effort, but weak in execution because of a too evident seeking for effect. That same tendency to create a special language had become marked in the somewhat enervating style of the Goncourt brothers, which, in Bourget's opinion, belongs in the ranks of decadent literature,—fated to be understood after a while only by a clique.<sup>47</sup> In Victor Hugo it had taken the form of an unceasing stream of metaphors, the number of which can best be ascertained through Duval's *Dictionnaire des Métaphores de V. Hugo*,<sup>48</sup> and in 1801 Morellet had deemed it

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Bertaut, *La Litt. féminine d'aujourd'hui*, 1909, pp. 281-282: "Il leur (women-writers) faut leurs paysages exotiques, leurs sensations imprévues, leurs spectacles inattendus, elles en sont ravies, car elles savent trouver dans cet imprévu qui déroute souvent l'observateur de l'autre sexe, une mine d'épithètes nouvelles, d'adjectifs inemployés, de curieuses rencontres d'expression, qu'elles se hâtent de s'approprier."

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Bourget, *Essais de Psychol. Contemp.*, I, pp. 22-23: "Le Psychologue que j'imagine raisonnerait de même à l'endroit des littératures de décadence. Il dirait: "Ces littératures non plus n'ont pas de lendemain. Elles aboutissent à des altérations de vocabulaire, à des subtilités de mots qui rendront le style inintelligible aux générations à venir. Dans cinquante ans, la langue des frères de Goncourt, par exemple, ne sera comprise que des spécialistes."

<sup>48</sup> Mabillean, *Victor Hugo*, 1911, p. 166.

wise to counsel Chateaubriand to *démétaphoriser*.<sup>49</sup> Delille's periphrases hid the want of personal warmth,<sup>50</sup> and very often those of Hugo concealed the absence of thought. Judged by the so-called Somaize of the seventeenth century,—the author of the dictionary of the *précieuses*,—the imaginative language of these men would have been rated as undoubted *préciosité*; and their contemporaries have so estimated it in many instances.

What the Romantic writers were undertaking to accomplish differed slightly from that which had been attempted previously. The real object of the *Pléiade*, in enunciating principles which developed into *préciosité*, had been to enrich and reanimate the language by adding to the number of usable words and rhetorical devices. In the eighteenth century the more or less conscious aim of *préciosité* was an increase in the stock of ideas or a multiplication of clever or subtle ideas. Without inventing much in the way of vocabulary, the Romanticists achieved *préciosité* by alliances of words and ideas which stirred the imagination, superinduced revery, and left in the lurch the regular French directness. The Symbolists, in turn, harking back to the Renaissance and the period of Louis XIV, and using as their text Fénelon's statement about the impoverishment of the language since the 16th century,<sup>51</sup> confess that they mean to increase the vocabulary and force rhetoric to meet their needs. When Moréas, in his manifesto, exhorts writers to employ "impollués vocables, . . . les pléonasmes significatifs, les mystérieuses ellipses, l'anacoluthie en suspens, tout trope hardi et multiforme,"<sup>52</sup>—he is simply repeating the program of the *Pléiade* and of the *précieuses* lashed by Molière. When Gustave Kahn asserts the right of authors to anticipate usage,<sup>53</sup> he is following one of the first laws of *préciosité*, which consists in holding

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Barat, *op. cit.*, p. vi.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Fleury, *op. cit.*, p. 288: "On connaît sa définition du cure-oreille et du cure-dent:

La merveille

Qui sert à rendre pure ou la bouche ou l'oreille,

et celle d'une fabrique d'où sortent

. . . ces milliers de dards dont les pointes légères

Fixent le lin flottant sur le sein des bergères,

vulgairement des épingles."

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Beaunier, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Moréas, *Prem. Armes du Symbolisme*, 1889, p. 34.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Beaunier, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

itself above the common law,—as the earlier *précieux* well understood,—and in coining expressions at will: and when he favors the use of adjectives and infinitives as substantives, and vice versa, and would, with slight changes, clothe every word with the power of serving as noun, adjective, adverb, verb, he is at one to a surprising degree with the older *précieus* and the *Pléiade*. When, too, Verlaine speaks of the ‘enormous and tender Middle Ages,’ ‘a slow landscape,’ ‘a gilded perfume,’<sup>54</sup> he is broadening the scope of poetry by a process which, often esthetically effective and much more ancient than the Renaissance,<sup>55</sup> has invariably, under a misguided conception or through sheer carelessness, degenerated into the most paltry of conceits.

That, nevertheless, the Symbolists have with set purpose exploited the latent artistic powers of metaphor and periphrasis,—the two rhetorical contrivances which formed the chief stock in trade of the 17th century *précieus*,—places their endeavors above the efforts of their predecessors by as much as the thinking reed is above the mere reed. Between Saint-Amant’s “encens de Bacchus” (tabac), or Berthod’s “un postillon d’Éole” (le vent), or the *précieuses*’ “les commodités de la conversation,” “le conseiller des Grâces,” and Saint-Pol Roux’s “sage-femme de la lumière” (le coq), “lendemain de chenille en tenue de bal” (papillon), “mamelles de cristal” (carafe), “coquelicot sonore” (chant du coq),<sup>56</sup> the poetic or literary attitude has altered considerably. What was formerly nothing more than the impulse to say something striking, pretty, clever, or strange has grown into a rather earnest wish to augment, by means of association and analogy, the amount of esthetic enjoyment to be derived from a poetic situation. To the Symbolist, metaphor and periphrasis, because they cause meditation and introspection, are the very essence of poetry itself. To the 17th century *précieuse*, they were an ingenious pastime. Similarly, what was for Somaize a satiric diversion in the compilation of his *Dictionnaire des Précieuses*, has become, for example, in Paul Adam’s *Glossaire de Plowert*, a fairly serious means of influencing the language.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Nordau, *Degeneration*, 1896, p. 126.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. the classical literatures, as also Old Norse (see Nordby, *The Influence of Old Norse Lit. upon English Lit.*, 1901, p. 15).

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Van Béver et Léautaud, *Poètes d’Aujourd’hui*, II, MCMX, p. 189.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Kahn, *op. cit.*, pp. 61-62: “Tel qu’il est et malgré l’abondance de ses fautes d’impression le petit volume, qui ne contient que nos néolo-

In a previous paper,<sup>58</sup> it has been shown that *préciosité*, even technically speaking, flourished in almost every period of French literary history prior to the 17th century. The present inquiry suggests its later continuance. It might, then, perhaps, be extremely undesirable to look on 17th century *préciosité* as a sudden, spontaneous and unique ailment,—as has been done in the past with a resultant wrench to the student's sense of real values. Possibly a more accurate notion of its ravages in the days of Molière and Boileau and of the importance of the onslaught on it by these and other writers may be obtained through a study of its progress in other epochs in French history and of the continual variation of the factors of which it is composed. If it is, in reality, a phase of human behavior rather than a purely literary trait,—as Roederer evidently held in making it the nucleus for his history of polite society in France in the 17th century; if it manifests itself in every country, in every age, and in every climate as one of the most practical and convenient means for distinction among the more pretentious in general education, artistic appreciation, social attributes; if it has served an especially good purpose in France through enrichment of vocabulary, quickening of imagination, toning-down of customs and manners;<sup>59</sup> then it presents a much wider and a much more interesting field for investigation than has heretofore been thought to exist, clearly points to the unity and family-relationship of similar manifestations, wherever they may occur, and finally sets at rest the heated arguments of Tiraboschi and his successors as to who started *préciosité*.

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gismes alors parus . . . offre cet intérêt, qu'en le parcourant on pourra voir que tous nos postulats d'alors ont été accueillis, et *sont entrés dans le courant de la langue* et ne dérangent plus que de très périmés dilettantes." This is one of a series of remarkable coincidences which suggest that the Symbolists apparently devoted much time to the study of 17th century *préciosité*.

<sup>58</sup> *Recurrent Préciosité, Mod. Lang. Notes*, xxxi, p. 129.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Brunetière, *Études Critiques*, III, p. 131: "Ne nous étonnons pas non plus si les œuvres sorties, pour ainsi dire, de l'inspiration plus ou moins prochaine de Mme de Lambert offrent des traits frappants de ressemblance avec celles qu'avait autrefois dictées l'influence de Mme de Rambouillet, puisque l'influence de l'une et l'inspiration de l'autre s'efforçaient de diriger la littérature et les mœurs vers un même idéal social."